

George Prokhorov* and Sergey Saveliev

Narrating and mapping Russia: From Terra Incognita to a charted space on the road to Cathay

<https://doi.org/10.1515/fns-2018-0023>

Abstract: In the 16th century most of Russia is still a terra incognita with a highly dubious and mostly mythologized geography, anthropology, and sociology. In this article we look at some texts of the Early Modern period – *Sir Thomas Smithes Voiage and Entertainment in Rushia* (1605), Peter Mundy’s Travel Writings of 1640–1641, and *The Voiages and Travels of John Struys* (1676–1683) – and try to uncover the transformation of the obscure country into a more or less charted space, filled with narratives of adventures and travels in an enigmatic land on the verge of Europe, where exotic cultures are drawn together in a flamboyant mix. It is travel narrative that actually charts the territory and provides an explanation from which stems a partial understanding, physical and cultural, of the “Land of the Unpredictable.”

Keywords: Muscovy, travelogues, narrative, Thomas Smythe, Peter Mundi, John Struys

1 Travel – map – narrative

Imagine a country which has not yet been discovered.¹ That unexplored area is just a territory, a pure Terra Incognita trapped in voicelessness. No stories. No impressions. No experience. No knowledge. Uncharted waters placed on a map as an adumbration marked with borders. That is what Muscovy was for centuries for a European traveler – a country connected with different khans and barbarous

¹ The present paper was prepared within the framework of the research grant No. 16-34-00017: supported by Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR).

***Corresponding author: George Prokhorov**, State University of Humanities and Social Studies, Literature (Kolomna, Russia), E-Mail: hoshea.prokhorov@gmail.com

Sergey Saveliev, State University of Humanities and Social Studies, Foreign Languages (Kolomna, Russia), E-Mail: saveliev.v.sergey@gmail.com

tribes rather than with courts and monarchs of the West (Freeze 2009: 14–16, 43–45; Raeff 1986: 16).

When a traveler emerges, he, rather more often in the Early Modern Era than she, uncovers the geography of the area. Thus, the simplest formula of travel literature, which may even symbolize the genre, is the following: from A to B there are X miles. We find it in every old piece of travel literature, whether the text is *A Travel of an Anonymous Citizen of Suzdal to The Council of Florence* written by Metropolitoe Isidore of Kiev, a Greece-born intellectual of the 15th century who unsuccessfully tried to seek a union of the Russian Church with Rome (“From Senj to Brinje, there are 15 miles” [Khozhdenie na Florentiyskiy 1981: 491]), or *The Description of the Chinese State and the Lands of Mongols Composed by Tomsk Cossack Ivan Petlin* written on the verge of the modernisation of Russia by Peter the Great (“From the land of Kyrgyzs to the river of Abakan there are six days on horseback” [Petlin 2018]) etc. From A to B is a “verbal map”. But can a narrative be presented in such a primitive travelogue formula?

Narration derives from events (Schmid 2003: 13–18) while “from A to B is X miles” appears to be a mere topographical statement. Now, what we encounter here is a radical transformation of an obscure and abstractive notion into a newly discovered part of the world having voices and stories, which are perceived, reflected and shared as a new experience (Bakhtin 2003: 13–17). What was once uncharted waters turns into a series of landscapes where people live and act. The formula reflects not just geography: due to the braiding of space, time and point of view in fiction (what Mikhail Bakhtin called “chronotope”), the expression is linked to narratives which will potentially fill every mile of landscape with stories reflecting the life and experiences of inhabitants as well as the encounters of two strangers – a foreign traveller and an aborigine.

A travelogue links the physical geography and the experience of life as a human; and a search for the link becomes an event – “a special, narrative, kind of human experience, alternative to procedurality and rituality” (Tyupa 2016: 17) – as well as the narrative center of travel literature.

We will look at three texts about travels into Muscovy written in the 17th century – *Sir Thomas Smithes Voiage and Entertainment in Rushia* (1605), Peter Mundy’s *Travel Writings of 1640–1641* and *The Voiages and Travels of John Struys* (1676–1683) – which focus on different parts of Muscovy but are equally remarkable for a European traveler: the river route from the Russian north to Moscow, the Russian Far North, and the continental inland way from the Baltics to Moscow and further to Persia and possibly beyond. We trace the intertwined discovery of (a) Muscovian geography, (b) Muscovian social experience, and (c) personal attitudes of foreign travellers towards Muscovy, which are found in travel writings of the 17th century and which shaped the very process of the transformation of

Muscovy from a narrative void to a charted space for merchants and a well-known road to Cathay.

2 Sailing & riding amidst myths and facts. The case of Thomas Smythe

Russia was unintentionally discovered in 1553 by Richard Chancellor who, while searching a North-Eastern Passage to India, arrived at today's Arkhangelsk. However, for Western Europeans and despite the reports of Richard Chancellor, Antony Jenkinson and Jerome Horsey from Muscovy, the country remains for the larger part of the 16th century a totally obscure place. Yet, the three men established contacts with the Russian Court and opened Muscovy for English merchants. But Russian geography, history, ethnography, and the social life of Muscovites were still a riddle. Moreover, relations between England and Muscovy were mostly 'medieval' – i.e. primarily relations between two monarchs. Thus, after the death of Ivan the Terrible and Elizabeth I, King James I sends Thomas Smythe to Muscovy to represent the new English Court.

Since Muscovy was at that time rapidly descending into the turmoil of what we now know as the Russian Time of Troubles, Smythe's mission was not a successful one. When Thomas Smythe returned to England, there was no one in Muscovy to oversee the implementation of the results achieved by the English ambassador. For more than a decade Russia would have no commonly recognized government.

But the political failure turns into a narrative success: the creation of some texts which 'opened' Muscovy to Western readers who were impressed by the bloody circumstances of the civil war. Remarkably, the texts referred neither to the Muscovy of cosmographs, nor to the big "hyperboreac" country inhabited by different exotic peoples. The images of a country populated by quite exotic tribes are present in 17th century travelogues and the Russian court even tries to exploit them to impress foreign diplomats and other visitors: "... the Emperors table served by two hund. Noblemen, all in coates of cloth of gold. The Princes table served with one hund. yong Dukes and princes of *Cassan, Astrican, Syberia, Tartaria, Chercasses, & Russes*, none above twenty yeares olde" (Smythe 1605).

But travellers are no longer excited by all this. The 'cosmographic' banquet seems to be nothing but pathetic: "To make you a perticular relation, I should do the entertainment wrong, consisting almost of innumerable dishes: Also, I should overcharge my memory, as then I did mine eyes and stomache, little delighting the Reader, because Garlicke and Onions..." (Smythe 1605). The recurrent pro-

nouncement of the official title of Muscovite Tsars looks like a strange local habit (Smythe 1605). Travelers do not stick to rituals glorifying either the political and military might of Russian Tsars or the vastity of the country. What they find notable is what exactly the country does and what actually are all those “*Rushia, Volademer, Moskoe and Novogorode, [...] Casan and Astracan, [...] Vobskoe, [...] Smolenskoe, Tuer, Huder, Vghory, Perme, Viatsky, Bolgory, &c*” (Smythe 1605).

In 1604–1605, when Thomas Smythe was on his official mission to Russia, the political situation seemed to be clear and nobody could even imagine what would happen six months later. His travel begins in Greenwich with the audience from the King:

All things therefore being ripe for his departure, sir *Tho.* accompanied with sir *Thomas Challenor*, and *S. William Wray* knights, diuers Gent. and his own attendants, repaired to the Court vpon the tenth of Iune 1604. then lying at *Greenwich*, where (by the right Hon. the Earle of *Salsbury*) he was brought to his Maiesties presence: who in very gracious language demaunded of sir *Thomas* the length of the voyage, the time of his returne, the nature of the Climate, with some other questions touching the countrey: vnto all which sir *Thomas* aunswered accordingly (Smythe 1605).

In the conversation, there are elements of “small talk” and a testing of how competent the ambassador is for his mission. We also see a set of stereotypes and – primarily – the image of Muscovy as an obscure country where nothing is certain, from travel routes and schedules to climate. Interestingly enough, the ambassador sailed to Russia after a half century of semi-regular contacts. The Muscovy Company had already been established and its merchants had been constantly present in Russia, constantly travelling in both directions by sea and by land. John Merrick, an official representative of the English Court and a permanent sales representative, lived in Russia for many years and sent an enormous number of reports to London. Moreover, the epochal book on Muscovy – *Of the Russe Common Wealth. Or, Maner of gouernement of the Russe emperour, (commonly called the Emperour of Moskouia) with the manners, and fashions of the people of that countrey* (1599) – had been written by Giles Fletcher and published in London. Smythe ignores all of this and introduces his Muscovy as an almost totally obscure country which is due to be discovered. His introduction to Muscovy is a look from England at the other side of Europe:

But the king wondring that the detetion there would be so long, [...] said, *It seemes then that Sir Thomas goes from the Sun:* vpon which the right Hon. the Earle of *Northampton* standing by replied, *He must needes go from the Sunne departing from his resplendant Ma.* (Smythe 1605)

The ongoing diplomatic mission is the first embassy after the suppression of the Ryurikid dynasty in Muscovy. Sir Thomas Smythe's journey to the faraway country is full of adventures from the very beginning, as it were. The writer focuses his readers' attention on the unprecedented and initiatory nature of the journey.

The next characteristic of Muscovy is presented in Smythe's farewell speech to the crew and merchants who stay in the port-city of Arkhangelsk:

...[s]hew our obedience thereafter in our liues, especially in a strange Country, where he is not rightly knowne: a people and Nation very subtle and crafty [...]. [e]specially, if you vvithall do but remember the colde Climate you are to live in Drukennes is rather here a custome, then a vice: yet themselues hate it in other. [...] Also Whoring in this Countrey is so common a sin, as their eies, can soone obserue it in straungers. (Smythe 1605)

The obscure country lies before their eyes but the message is not designed to stimulate the interest in discovery of his companions but to enumerate the 'dangers' to which they are exposed: the cold, alcohol, harlots and the strange version of Christianity which is common in Muscovy. Thomas Smythe states he is waiting for a contact with the aborigines but he does not expect too much from the talks. From the roadstead of Muscovite Arkhangelsk, he continues to look at a territory which has no relation to him or to his companions.

The point of view changes when Thomas Smythe is in an inland road where he discovers the factual geography of Muscovy, perceiving and evaluating the unexpected landscapes: "...[s]o we passed along on our Iourney, which was as pleasant and delightfull, wheather you consider the admirable straight pine, tall Cedar, or fyrrer woods; *Alablaster* Rockes, or the pleasantnes of walkes, in sweet Meadows, and fair pastures, than which, for 1000. vers cannot be more welcom in the whole world." (Smythe 1605)

In a place sometimes linked to the image of a Cold-Windy-Snowy-Country, landscapes with meadows, alabaster rocks, and pines emerge which refer to something 'close', something European if not directly English. A shift in the traveller's vision of Muscovites follows the revelation of the factual geography of the Russian North. Instead of "very subtle and crafty" people without "right knowledge of God", good manners and kind gentlemen surface: "...presently after his departing, the *Ambas.* sent sixe of his Liueries, and his *Enterpreter* or *Tolmatch* to his boat, with a banquet, which he very kindly and thankfully accepted" (Smythe 1605). A country which looked like a trap for any foreigner turns into a comfortable home for a native Englishman: "passing through *Shepetscoy*, (where wee lay) and dwels an English gentleman named *Georg Garland*, sometime seruant to that Noble but vnfortunate E. of *Essex*, of whom many through the world, do make in diuers kinds, but [...] neuer any can make but honorable mention." (Smythe 1605).

The comprehension developed inland, in factual Muscovy, is the opposite of the former vision produced from books and myths. If one is to believe, say, Antonio Possevino who was alive at the time of the journey and whose treatise, *Muscovia* (1586), was quite influential, an ambassador had no rights to communicate either with Muscovites or with foreigners at Russian courts. Even free movement was prohibited for a person on a mission (Possevino 1977: 17). Thomas Smythe's experience is totally different:

[...] wee being lodged in that large house builded for the Entertainment of 2000. *Poles*[.] [...] the same house the yong *Prince Iohn of Denmarke*, Brother to that *King*, and our now *Queene of England* did lodge in, who would haue married the young *Princes Oucksinia*, the *Emperors* onely Daughter, but that hee vnghappily there died of a surfet, as I was creadible informed of one of the Em. Doctors. The Ambassad. as Plaid lying in the same house [...], and after walked in those lodg. though they were for the most part barred vp and kept close: which often seeing of the chamb. where he departed being brother to our Noble and vertuous Quee. wrought a desire in vs to see his toomb. The kings gentlemen and some others, hauing the Emp. horses and sleads, rode to their *Sloboda*, as we call it *Suberbes*, wher in the *Chancell* of the *dutch Church* he vvas interred, with a great and Princelie obsequy: the Emp himselfe and Prince, attending the corps to the first gate, but all his Councillors, Nobles, gentlemen, [et]c, following to the Church where they stayed tyll the Sermon was ended. Hee had a large toombe couered with blacke veluet, ma|ny banners and Scutcheons hanging about the body of the Church and chancel, with his Armes and Creast, and considering the country, very princely. (Smythe 1605)

Everything changes so rapidly that any data becomes obsolete at a certain point. The journey is inspired by a mixture of desire for adventures and practical purpose. While the former lures Thomas Smythe and his companions into unknown country and society, the latter demands a true description of the country from them. Thus, the travelogue replaces the imagined geography of early cosmographs with real evidence, hearsay and incorrect information with 'fresh' data, and the text provides a clearer picture of the country both geographically and ethnographically, enlarging the very limits of the world.

3 On words and things: The case of Peter Mundy

The name of Peter Mundy, a merchant from Cornwall does not often come up in the discussions of 17th-century travel narrative. Indeed, such figures as Sir Thomas Roe, Thomas Coryate, or the amazing William Lithgow often overshadow the somewhat lowlier figure of Mundy, whose writing is frequently surpassed in terms of style by that of his counterparts, who show more verbal prowess. Mundy traveled widely and from 1620 to 1657 visited Turkey, India, China, Japan, Russia and the countries around the Baltic. He makes his journey

to Russia in June 1641 via the Northern route, i.e. via Arkhangelsk, where he stays until September.

Mundy who, unlike ambassadors, is less constrained by diplomatic protocol and the nature of a political mission, can simply see and note more. A different physical viewpoint is constructed in his narrative. Mundy arrives in Russia by sea, as most travellers have historically done. No navigator himself, Mundy nonetheless pays great attention to situating himself in the world by meticulously noting grid references of his movements around the masses of water and land not yet known to him. He gives his reader back in England a frame of spatial reference, but only to a point:

The 19th [July 1641]. Wee were thwart off Sweattnose in [67° 58'] degrees. From Wardhouse [Vardö] hither a Faire Forme of land, although ill conditioned, the snow re-mayning here and there.

... The Country hereaboutts yeilds nott much Come, Fruit or herbes, etts., such as with us; yett some corne wee saw reaped greene, soe hangued uppe to dry². Butt in other partts of the land more Southerly, there is plenty and enough to supplie other Countries; allsoe some Fruitts, herbes, etts., which the coldnesse of this Climate will nott permitt to grow and ripen, this place lying in 64 degrees [64° 32'] North lattitude. [1] (Mundy 194, 224)

As we can see, Mundy gives us the exact grid references only for a cape of Kola Peninsula and Arkhangelsk itself, so that the question arises of how to chart the area between these two points. Since Mundy is travelling *around* Russia *per se*, the option of a logbook format – i.e., “on day A of month B we arrived at place C” – is not available to him. Hence a different strategy is adopted for charting the land and transforming it into a country. Mundy looks at anthropology and material culture and defines the country as a space where certain people live, with Samoeds providing for Mundy the most striking image:

Att this tyme of the yeare repaire hither a certaine people called Samoyeds, Cladd from head to Foote in deere skynnes, somtymes with the hairy side outtwards, sometymes Inwards, according to heatt or colde. The[y] are very browne, low statured, bigge Mouthed, smalle eyed, somewhat like Chinois, or rather like Tartars, as swart as the Malayans in the Hands off Pulo Timaon [and] Pulo Laore by the straightls off Mallacca¹, lying almost under the equinoctiall, aboutt 2 degrees North. They eatt all Manner off Trash, as gutts, garbage, etts., sometymes Raw, sometymes halffe roasted, a very strange wild beastly people, somewhat like to those aboutt Cape Bona Esperance. As Farre as I could gather From them, they are Neither Christians Nor Turcks, butt observe a certayne religion, having preists off their owne³. They may keepe Many wives. They use long bowes and arrowes headed with bone, which they use in their hunting of dear, etts. as allso to Fightt. They come first from a Country lying farre Eastward From hence, called Samoyeda. (Mundy 220)

As we can see from this rather lengthy passage, Mundy does not feel that geographical reference is enough; rather, he defines the Samoeds as a people with a certain physical appearance, certain habits, and a certain ideology. But is it enough? Mundy makes a journey to Russia closer to the end of his career as a traveller, and, according to Peter Whitfield, intends to publish his oeuvre (Whitfield 2011: 97). He understands that a description of Samoeds that is characterised by utter precision will not transform a territory into a land unless he relates them to other nations. Relating Samoeds to Tatars and Chinese and Malayans, he immediately contextualizes them for his reader as exotic yet understandable, as a ‘familiar exotic’. Interestingly enough, Mundy does not, at least openly, claim that his observations have more authority than those of others, which, at the height of the Early Modern Era and on the threshold of the Age of Reason gives his account even more credibility: “Thus much in breiff I have sett downe off thatt kind off people and their language, which I gathered by a sleightt enquiry and badd interpreters. Itt is somwhatt More or lesse [correct], somwhatt by eyesightt and some by report.” (Mundy 226)

But do mere verbal descriptions suffice, especially if you have to rely on ‘bad’ interpreters? Can one rely on words in an attempt to describe something the reader has never seen? If we follow Mundy’s logic, they do not and one cannot. Very much like a modern traveler whose voyage cannot be credible unless supported with geotagged images of a faraway place, posted online from a smartphone, Mundy, in a sense, sets the trend by giving crude but, at the very same time, quite accurate images of Samoeds, churches in Arkhangelsk, and peculiar Russian caps and dress. Mundy is after the material embodiments of culture which makes him similar to the tourists of the modern age, keen to bring back memories of the place visited:

No carved Images allowed, only painted, which they will Nott sell to any Nor endure thatt any off another Reli[gi]on should handle them. I could nott procure one off their pictures on no termes, Allthough I solicited English and Dutch thatt they would send one of their servauntts to buy one For mee (they beeing openly sould in the Markett). Butt the servantt durst nott, saying if itt should com to bee knowne thatt hee boughtt one For a Stranger, hee should run danger to bee bumtt For itt. Soe much do they reverence pictures.

4 Tall stories, translations and amateur ethnographies: The case of Jan Struys

The name of Jan Struys evoked, at least in the 17th century, the epitome of a traveller. His *Three Voyages* had its admirers and critics, with Struys himself

becoming a kind of celebrity. His books could have been lost in the sheer volume of other travel writing, yet the narrative strategy that he chose seems to have hit the right strings and fitted into the intellectual atmosphere of the age.

Irina Mikhailova argues that the 17th century was the Golden Age for Dutch prose writing, with travel narratives being surpassed in popularity only by the Dutch Bible, the *Statenbijbel*. (Mikhailova 2013: 131). Apart from the social and political reasons for this, there are, in the case of Struys, some aspects of the text's poetics which make it stand out. Jan Struys visits Russia on his third voyage, which he undertakes in 1668. At that time Russia was a territory rather than a country for the European reader and traveller cognizant of the treatise *Beschreibung der muscowitischen und persischen Reise* by Adam Olearius, and any new source of information on a vast mass of land in the East and its standing in a Europe saturated with religious conflict and ready for colonial expansion was indeed of great value. Indeed, despite the presence of Dutch and English trade missions in Muscovy since the 16th century, not much was known about it. Struys' text is thus a bold attempt to chart Russia and, arguably, try to fit it into the jigsaw of Europe, as slightly odd and exotic, but still rather European.

Struys, unlike Mundy, takes the 'land route'. He sails from Amsterdam to Riga, from where he travels via Novgorod and Tver to Moscow and then down to Astrakhan. Struys' narrative is structured as a logbook in which he notes almost every place he travels through with dates and times of departure and arrival, and sometimes even the distance covered: "On the 13 we came to Omula, which is a Village about 40 [English] Leagues from Dydenof. After two days Sailing we came to Pereslaf, which is a small City... On the 17 we came close to Resanski where we viewed the Ruins of the City, which testified the former Greatness and Strength of the Town." (Struys 1684: 158)

It is worth noting that the further away he is from Moscow, a relatively familiar ground for the traveller into Russia, the more detailed Struys's descriptions are and he becomes a verbal cartographer.

A significant portion of the 'Russian part' of the Third Voyage is taken by the lengthy descriptions of Russian culture, economy, politics and ethnography. This hybridity – within one book we find an autobiography, a picaresque story, letters, and even elements of journalism – was not totally uncommon but it clearly marked the transition from a travelogue as such to the epistolary novel. It is probably the journalistic element that not only humanizes the territory but also transforms it into a country in its own right, however strange it might seem:

In Winter they muffle up their Nose and Ears in Furs, especially when they go upon a Journey. And in Moscou it is well seen that many of the Inhabitants have neither Nose nor Ear, which they say is by coming out of the bitter cold Air into a hot Stove: for although it

may seem strange, yet cannot that be avoided in some places, unless they rub their Noses and Ears, which are frozen, in Snow till they grow hot, which done they may come into a House without danger, and this you shall see them continually a doing in such Seasons. (Struys 1684: 139)

Another way of transforming the territory into landscape is to give a description of the surrounding countryside:

Here about is a very fair Countrey and as fertile as any that ever I have seen in all my Life. It is mostly low arable and meadow ground overflown once a year upon the swelling of the River VVolga. On the Banks of this said River are variety of Fruit trees of many kinds, which grow in whole Groves together and wild, for a hundred Dutch Leagues, as Hasle-nuts, Cherries 3 or 4 several sorts, Black; White and Red Currans, &c. That part of Casan which lies most within Land formerly belonged to the Tartars, but the Inhabitants speake the Russian Language, which was first brought in when the Countrey was conquered by the Russes, as shall be hereafter said. They do not convert any man to slavery, nor make that their Traffic, as do the Nagay the Crim-Calmuc-and Dagestan-Tartars, for if they had they might have sold me when with other two of our Ships-company I was under their Hands, and that above 3 leagues within Land, where on the contrary we found them civil after their Manner, for they gave us Bread and Milk to eat. (Struys 1684: 166)

Struys makes this observation from the ship *Oryol* and, obviously, he cannot actually see that far, but to *actually* see becomes less important than to say that something exists.

The land becomes real when it is deprived of mystery or when a certain assumption about it is tested against field data:

This River was of old supposed to run into the VVolga, as some Geographers have been pleased to write, but later experience has fairly contradicted that opinion, for their Boats which are no more than trunks of trees hollowed, they are fain to drag and trail a days Journey over Land before they find the VVolga, at the nearest distance those Rivers ly to each other, where when they are come they ty heavy Balks on each side to keep them above Water, and to give them a due ballance and poize in their floating. (Struys 1684: 194)

However, Struys sometimes retains the fabulous elements, like the story of the Baranetz plant or St. Anthony's voyage on a stone from Rome to Novgorod, but he narrates them only as something he has been told and does not necessarily believe. The functioning of his combination of eyewitness accounts and stories told by locals is twofold. On the one hand, we have an amateur, yet very perceptive and intelligent, ethnography about Russia; on the other, the magical element puts the factual information in the context of Russian everyday life and customs which seem irrational to Struys:

They have several superstitious Ceremonies concerning purity, as to the outward, and carry themselves very strictly according to the Traditions of the Church. They hold it not for so hainous a Sin to perform the Works of Unchastity with a Woman, as to do it in presence of an Image, or having their Cross about them, for that they lay off upon such Occasions, and if it be in the Room where an Image hangs, they draw a Curtain before it, as if they were sure that that Image was an Informer, and one that got Bread and Butter for telling School-tales. (Struys 1684: 147)

A more extreme case of using the text as a tool for creating a country from a territory is the use of translation. The example of Struys' text is instrumental here as it went through not only several editions but also numerous translations into major European languages. One of the first to appear was the English one, made in 1684 just eight years after the original publication in 1676, which was relatively quick by the standards of the 17th century. The motives behind this translation are at the same time political, financial and ideological. Indeed, if the Netherlands is your arch enemy at the time, it makes a lot of sense to know how much they know; what is more, a travelogue would sell well, a fact well proven by the sheer amount of surviving copies. Still, the translator, John Morrison, saw in this book a bit more than another book of tall stories; he saw a travel narrative of a new type, something the English public had long been waiting for, a non-Mandeville type of story:

IT is a thing no less customary than unmannerly among som, who will hold all things for forged and false, except what themselvs see, and would have all themselvs say to be received for Oracles. 'Tis not long ago that a young Sycophant (and one perhaps, who thought himsel [...] something prejudic'd) affirmed that the Pourfiles of those Persian Citie and others, were but imaginary Fictions, and that, I beleev, because the Etcher had set the Letter [In.] for [Invenit] after his Name as who should say, but that every Engraver and Etcher understood s [...] much Latin, as rightly to distinguish between Pinxit, Invenit, Sculpsit, Fecit and Excudit, which they often use promiscuously for each other: but besides my knowledge of our Travailers ability in Drawing, I have other reasons to give credit to him, as to his faithfull Delineation of those Places, which, for this time being so narrowly circumscribed, I am forc'd to ommit. (Struys 1684: 3)

The translator's preface also casts some light on the apparent discrepancy between the Dutch and the English texts in the sections that we are now able to corroborate, like the marriage of Cornelius Brack and a girl from van Sweeden's house:

THE Gentleman's reason, I conceiv, was because the Matter of what he thought good to ommit was not so solid, containing som homely Passages not to be taken notice of, and consequently would not endure such soaring Language, as things more sublime and important would, for, *Ex quovis ligno non fit Mercurius*. Nor had it bin less warrantable for me

to have don the like, and tacitly to have passed over such humble Matter as would rather challenge an expression of homely Sentences than festivity of Style, which the friendly Reader will find I'me no where guilty of. (Struys 1684: 2)

Here we see that something that was considered either too crude, or too festive or not too important could be either transformed or left out. Indeed, if you cannot check the facts, which our translator often does in the marginalia where he sometimes challenges Struys, you should not be misleading your public. Yet, this is not always the case as sometimes the translator adds a bit of Englishness to the story, when he thinks that the reader would get too bored with facts, or when the Dutch original does not seem funny enough:

On the 23 we came to a very pleasant Coast where we went to ashoar, and found there the Ruins of a great City which had been made wast by Tamarlan. While we lay here it began to blow very hard, and the next day we were fain to keep at anchor. In the mean time I went with some of our Ships Company to the Hill Arbuchin, where we found the Ruins of another City, bearing one name with the said Hill. In ascending the Hill we found a great stone with this Inscription in old Russian Words and Letters, IF THOU WILT REMOVE, THOU SHALT NOT LOSE THY PAINS. Some Russians had a mind to see what would come of it, and after long digging and much struggling at last got it turn'd over, but, instead of finding a Treasure, met with another Motto, which was, THOU ASS GO SHAKE THY EARS. This vexed them so that they rather willed to let it stand in that posture, than take the pains to set it as it was before, to deceive others. (Struys 1684: 172)

The original Dutch version did not, of course, contain a Shakespearean insult from *Twelfth Night* and *Julius Caesar* and was probably added not only to amuse the well-read audience of the book but also to make that landscape more like home with a pinch of English wit.

5 Conclusion

In just a century, travel narratives transformed Muscovy, turning the once uncharted waters into a relatively familiar country, most corners of which were sailed, ridden or even walked through by Europeans. They led to the demythologization of Muscovy and transformed the mysterious country of the North, the sheer existence of which bordered on fable, into an entity with real geographical and sociological characteristics. They constituted a tale of adventure and discovery with three consistent themes: factual-based geography of Russia, attention to cultural and ethnographic detail, and personal attitudes towards a country lying within reach of most European countries and yet very difficult to access, and often even more difficult to comprehend, making the traveller (and possibly his reader)

question his own ideological standing and challenging his ‘self.’ But did they succeed? Looking at the observations of Thomas Smythe or Peter Mundy, or following the adventures of Jan Struys on the Volga, arguably the aqueous epitome of Russian national identity, we cannot but think of the tourists aboard the ‘Maxim Gorky’ cruise liner from Bruce Chatwin’s *The Volga*, sailing down the Volga and then the Don, observing the country, listening to the local narratives, (mis)interpreting them, and constructing their own stories, recharting the seemingly familiar map of a country still so unfamiliar.

References

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 2003. Kfilosofii postupka [Toward a Philosophy of the Act]. In *Sobranie sochineniy v 7 tomakh* [Collected Works in 7 Volumes]. Vol. 1. Moscow: Russkie slovari & Yazyki slavyanskoy kul'tury.
- Freeze, Gregory (ed.). 2009. *Russia: A History*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Khozhdzenie na Florentiyskiy sobor neizvestnogo suzdal'tsa [A Travel of an Anonymous Citizen of Suzdal to The Council of Florence]. 1981. In *Pamyatniki literatury Drevney Rusi*. 14 – seredina 15 veka [Literary monuments of the Old Russia. 14th – the mid of 15th century]. Moscow: Khudozhestvennaya literatura.
- Mikhaylova, Irina. 2013. Ot “Lisa Reynarda” do “Sna bogov”. *Istoriya niderlandskoy literatury v 2-kh tomakh* [From Reynard the fox to The dream of gods. History of Dutch literature in 2 volumes]. Vol. 1: [12th–20th centuries]. St. Petersburg: Alexandria.
- Mundy, Peter & Richard C. Temple. 2017. *The travels of Peter Mundy, in Europe and Asia, 1608–1667*. Vol. I–V (Hakluyt Society. Second series). London: Hakluyt Society.
- Petlin, Ivan. 2018 [1619]. *Rospis' Kitayskogo gosudarstva i Mongol'skikh zemel', sostavlenaya tomskim kazakom I. Petlinym* [Description of Chinese State and the lands of Mongols written by Ivan Petlin, Cossack of Tomsk]. In *Vostochnaya literatura: srednevekovye istoricheskie istochniki Vostoka i Zapada* [Literature of the East. Medieval sources from the East and the West]. http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/Dokumenty/Mongol/Rus_mong_1/21-40/34.phtml?id=13464 (accessed 27 February 2018)
- Possevino, Antonio. 1977 [1586]. *The Moscovia of Antonio Possevino*. Pittsburg: Pittsburgh University Press.
- Raeff, Marc. 1986. *Muscovy looks west*. *History Today* 36 (8). <http://www.historytoday.com/marc-raeff/muscovy-looks-west> (accessed 27 February 2018).
- Schmid, Wolf. 2003. *Narratologiya* [Narratology]. Moscow: Yazyki slavyanskoy kul'tury.
- Smythe, Thomas, Sir. 1605. *Sir Thomas Smithes voiage and entertainment in Rushia With the tragicall ends of two emperors, and one empress, within one moneth during his being there: and the miraculous preservation of the now reigning emperor, esteemed dead for 18. Yeares*. London: [By W. White & W. Jaggard] for Nathanyell Butter. <http://name.umd.umich.edu/A12545.0001.001> (accessed 27 February 2018.)
- Struys, Jan J., David Butler & John Morrison. (eds.). 1684. *The Voiages and travels of John Struys through Italy, Greece, Muscovy, Tartary, Media, Persia, East-India, Japan, and other countries in Europe, Africa and Asia: Containing remarks and observations upon the manners,*

religion, politics, customs and laws of the inhabitants; and a description of their several cities, towns, forts, and places of strength: together with an account of the authors many dangers by shipwreck, robbery, slavery, hunger, torture, and the like. And two narratives of the taking of Astracan by the Cossacks, sent from Captain D. Butler. Illustrated with copper plates, designed and taken from the life by the author himself. Done out of Dutch by John Morrison. London: Printed for Abel Swalle.

Tyupa, Valerii. 2016. *Vvedenie v sravnitel'nuyu narratologiyu* [Introduction to Comparative Narratology]. Moscow: Intada.

Whitfield, Peter. 2011. *Travel: A literary history*. Oxford: Bodleian Library.